

Creating Brush Piles

All animals need dense cover throughout the year for various reasons: concealment and protection from predators, protection from severe weather, and for resting or loafing cover. In areas where dense tangles of brush and vines are absent or limited, artificial brush piles can be constructed to provide much needed cover for ground nesting birds, rabbits, songbirds, and other small animals.

Brush piles should be constructed along forest edges and in openings, field corners, or along the margins of streams and marshes. Brush piles should be situated near grassy areas or cultivated lands so that food and nesting habitat can easily be found near the protective cover of the brush piles. In open areas where cover is lacking, three to four brush piles per acre should be constructed. Along woodland borders, one brush pile every 200 to 300 feet will provide adequate cover as well as travel lanes to other areas.

Brush piles should be built in conjunction with land clearing or forest thinning operations. The materials used for the brush pile will depend upon what is locally available. Rot resistant trees, such as oaks and locust, make durable bases for the brush piles as do old lumber or timbers you might have laying around. The base of the brush pile should be formed by placing alternate layers of logs at right angles to one another. The logs used should be at least six inches in diameter and spaced six to ten inches apart in each layer. To increase the durability of the brush pile, the base layers may be stacked on top of stones, tires, cinder blocks, or around large stumps. It is important to remember that the base will act to keep pathways open under the pile once the brush is placed on top. To enhance these pathways, you might want to place old sections of drainage tile in the base or cut holes in old tires to create dens for small mammals. Smaller trees and brush should be piled on top of the base until a mound or tepee-shaped brush pile is created. Any brush may be used as filling on the piles; hardwood tree tops will last longer, but evergreens (such as discarded Christmas trees) can provide

excellent, short term cover. Finished piles should be four to eight feet tall and 10 to 20 feet in diameter. If you choose to build a rectangular shaped brush pile, it should be at least 10 to 15 feet wide and at least 25+ feet long.

Remember, build the brush piles dense enough in the center to provide adequate shelter from adverse weather and predators but loose enough around the edges to allow for easy access. Strict attention should be given to the size of the brush piles built. The tendency is to make brush piles too small. If a person can kick a brush pile over, or a dog can burrow through them, they are too small. □

1.



3.



4.



Four steps to building a brushpile

Graphic from U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Schoolyard Habitat Project Guide, Oct. '99.



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